



## Notes from LEAD Editor

*This month in **LEAD** you will find articles that build upon our May 2001 Communication Issue. This edition provides specific situations where effective communication can help improve performance, morale, and working relationships. You will also find articles that provide tools for communicating between generational differences, effectively using praise in the workplace, preparing for challenging conversations, and communicating when mistakes are made in the workplace. We encourage you to use and share the ideas you find in **LEAD**!*

Communication

## Use COMMUNICATION TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

All managers, supervisors, and employees should not underestimate the importance of effective communication. Effective, continuous, and open communication can help reduce the amount of mistakes made on the job, but most importantly can help employees better understand their roles and responsibilities.

With a little extra effort, your words can go a long way in helping to make employees feel like important members of the team. With this understanding, you can greatly impact the work environment. Here's how:

**1. EXPLAIN, DON'T DICTATE.** Take the time to let employees know why a certain task must be done and why it must be completed in a certain manner. Perhaps you run the risk of breaking critical equipment if operations are not performed in a specific order; without communication, the employee may fail to understand the importance of his or her role. Knowledge empowers employees and helps them create a vested interest in their work.

**2. AVOID THE GRAPEVINE.** Don't take it for granted that all employees have been told about an important decision or meeting. You run the risk of your message being distorted

along the way. Also, if you discuss matters with only one or two people instead of the whole team, you may bruise the egos of employees who were not included in the initial conversation.

**3. ASK FOR INPUT.** Again, good managers want employees to learn from their experiences and understand why things are done the way they are done. At the same time, though, you may benefit from a fresh perspective. After completion of an assignment, ask the employee for his or her thoughts. You too, may learn something.

-Adapted from *The Motivational Manager*, (800) 878-5331, [www.ragan.com](http://www.ragan.com)

## HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF FOR CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

**The role of leader frequently requires you to engage in difficult tasks. When you must talk over a troubling problem with an employee, remember this advice as you prepare for the meeting:**

**1. Explore your motives.** Before you meet with the other person, think about your underlying goals. How will this conversation benefit the organization, your department, the other person, or you? If you sense that you're avoiding the discussion, ask yourself what has been holding you back so you can overcome your hesitation. Finally, think about the consequences of not acting. This should help motivate you to act.

**2. Visualize problems.** Recognize that some talks just don't go smoothly no matter how positive your intentions are. Then take yourself through a worst-case scenario. Probably what you imagine will be worse than the reality, but you'll be better prepared mentally by facing the negatives ahead of time.

**3. Now visualize success.** What do you expect the conversation to accomplish? Visualize a successful outcome to the discussion; once you know what conclusion you want, you can probably think up some strategies for leading the conversation there.

**4. Set the stage.** Decide when and where you want to have the discussion. You'll probably want a comfortable setting for both of you. It is important to meet in a private setting where there will not be any distractions. Remember, the purpose of the meeting is for both people to have the opportunity to talk and contribute. With open communication, both parties can help agree upon a viable solution.

-Adapted from "Raising Difficult Issues," by Grande Lum, from Monster.com website





## What To Say, and Not SAY, to GENXERS

Communicating across any generation gap can be challenging. If you're a Baby Boomer trying to talk with a member of Generation X, the key is to reframe your questions in a way that won't alienate the younger worker. Here are some examples:

### Don't say:

- "That would never work."
- "We've already tried that, and it didn't work."
- "You don't have the experience to understand why we do this."
- "You haven't put any thought into this."
- "This is what you have to do."

### Instead say:

- "Can you explain why that idea seems practical to you?"
- "We tried a similar approach before, and it didn't seem to work. How is your idea different?"
- "That's an interesting idea, but I think we might run into some problems. Let me explain our experience, and we'll see if we can avoid the obstacles."
- "Tell me your thinking behind this idea?"
- "We need to accomplish X, and we have certain restraints. Let's talk about some strategies for getting it done."

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## MOVING FORWARD

No matter how well the organization functions, problems do arise from time-to-time. People are human, and therefore, make mistakes. The important thing is to understand how to best deal with the circumstances. Recognize that mistakes or problems can be turned into great learning experiences for everyone involved. Therefore, to make the best out of a situation where a mistake has occurred, remember these simple tips when communicating with employees.

**Think through the situation.** You don't want to approach the employee without thinking through what you want to say. Therefore, plan what you want to say before discussing it with the individual.

**Act quickly.** Ignoring a problem in hopes that it will vanish on its own rarely works. You need to address the problem promptly, while it's still fresh in your mind and in the employee's, as well.

**Explain what the problem is.** Even if the employee is familiar with a process or procedure, he or she may not fully understand why following it is important. Be sure the employee understands the real nature of the problem.

## HOW TO GIVE EFFECTIVE PRAISE IN THE WORKPLACE

### 1. Praise with purpose:

The purpose of praise, at work, is to increase employee morale and employee productivity. The purpose is not to get employees to like you. Praise is not the same as a compliment. Telling an employee that you like their Denver Bronco's jacket is a compliment. Telling an employee that skills at resolving customer complaints are a valuable asset to the company, is praising effectively.

### 2. Target your praise:

Target your praise to specific accomplishments, and not to general work. It is better to say, "Mary, that presentation you made this morning was very helpful and informative." vs. "Mary, you are a great employee to have around." Praise helps reward the employee for hard work, and increases the chance that they will continue to perform at a high level. Asking an employee for input or feedback is another way to target your praise. When you ask employees for advice, you are praising their intelligence.

### 3. Believe your praise:

In order for praise to work you need to be sincere and honest about it. An employee can easily pick up on insincere praise, thus causing you to lose your credibility and ability to motivate them in the future with praise.

### 4. Praise in proportion:

Praising an employee too frequently waters down the effectiveness of your praise; on the other hand, praising too little is also ineffective. Certain employees may require more praise than other employees. Adolescents generally need more praise than adults, new employees need more praise than experienced employees, and employees lacking confidence require more praise.

### 5. Praise in public:

If it does not embarrass the employee, a public method of praise is helpful to improve the morale of all the employees. A brief mention at a meeting, a note in a company newsletter, or a note to their supervisor are all methods of simple public praise.

-Adapted from "Use Praise to Motivate Employees," from *Employer-Employee.com*

**Don't beat around the bush.** You'll only waste time and appear indecisive if you don't deal with the issue promptly. Bear in mind that employees want to do a good job and appreciate honest feedback if it's fair and timely

**Maintain open lines of communication.** Discuss the issue with the employee and concentrate on finding solutions that work for the both of you.

**Follow up.** Discussing a problem with an employee isn't a one-time affair. If you don't follow up on your efforts, it may take away from coming up with long-term solutions.

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